

# Access and Functional Needs: Operationalizing Accessibility During the COVID-19 Pandemic Response

Presentation provided by

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# Access & Functional Needs

Access and Functional Needs demographics: Individuals with access and functional needs may include, but are not limited to people with disabilities, older adults, Limited English Proficiency, children, and persons with limited access to transportation.

The Access and Functional Needs Officer (AFNO) to the VEST for VDEM supports and assists the emergency operations center and incident management personnel on matters related to people with disabilities and others with access and functional needs (AFN).

The COVID-19 pandemic has “unmasked” the fact that accessibility is critical for health and wellbeing.

Accessibility is lifesaving.

Accessibility must be “baked in.”

This includes...

Communication  
& Information

Physical spaces

Digital spaces

Transportation

# Operationalizing Accessibility

**Communication & Information:** Press conferences interpreted in ASL and Spanish; culturally and linguistically appropriate translation of materials; accurate captioning

**Physical spaces:** ADA compliance for testing and vaccination sites (the DoJ recommends that this checklist is suitable for [vetting temporary indoor vaccination sites](#), and the ADA National Network provides guidance for [drive through medical sites](#); appropriate and effective [interaction with people with disabilities](#))

**Digital spaces:** [Section 508 compliance](#) for digital documents; messaging creatives; using plain language (4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> grade reading level); screen reader compatibility

**Transportation:** options for how to get to testing and vaccination sites (are they on a bus route? Can a bus route be added? Is paratransit available? Can people walk-up or roll-up to the site?)

...these are just a few of the considerations

## Other resources that may assist in operationalizing accessibility during COVID-19...

- [Vaccination site AFN guidance](#) document for distribution by VDH
- Communication Accessibility guidance documents and Just-in-Time training <https://www.vaemergency.gov/communication-accessibility-guidance/>
- [Health Equity Guidebook document and accompanying checklist](#) (operationalizing HE and AFN considerations for testing and tracing)

# Example from the field:

Español



Everyone in Virginia Age 16 or Older Is Eligible for the COVID-19 Vaccine Now!

**Here's How to Get Vaccinated:**

 **Online**

Search by Location

 **By phone**

**(877) VAX-IN-VA**  
(877) 829-4682



**ASL NOW**

*Video chat for American Sign Language*

 **High risk?**

**Are you at high risk from COVID-19?**

If you are eligible in Phase 1a, 1b, or 1c and you don't find an appointment through [Vaccines.gov](#) that meets your needs, you may pre-register for a priority appointment and your local health district will contact you within a week to schedule your appointment.

**Pre-register Online**

**Phase 1 Eligibility Criteria:**

**How we can help:**

The call center can help you schedule an appointment if one is

➤ Established ASL-to-ASL direct communication access for the Vaccinate Virginia call center. Virginia is the first state in the nation to do this for a vaccination information line

➤ Language services are available for people who speak languages other than English

## Supporting Virginia's COVID-19 Response

AFNO continues to provide information and best practices, and resources on accessibility to state, local, and private sector partners, Governor's office, VDH, Office of Health Equity at VDH, Joint Information Center, various state agencies including as requested, referring concerns to appropriate channels as needed. Also collaborating with FEMA's Office of Disability Integration

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **EDVA Reminds Community Partners That the Americans With Disabilities Act Applies to COVID-19 Related Services**

ALEXANDRIA, Va. – The U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Virginia announced today that it will be providing the attached [Dear Colleague Letter](#) reminding community partners that are involved in the COVID-19 pandemic response that the Americans with Disabilities Act ("ADA") applies to their services.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has had a severe and distressing impact on people with disabilities, who, through no fault of their own, have faced additional barriers due to the public health crisis," said Raj Parekh, Acting U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia. "We will vigorously pursue justice on behalf of those who are not provided equal access because of their disability. It is absolutely critical that COVID-19 resources, including vaccines and testing, are implemented in a manner that ensures individuals with disabilities are not subjected to discrimination and are able to access those services."

The Dear Colleague Letter explains that ADA "considerations may include: whether registration systems

Why should AFN considerations be "baked into" your Concept of Operations?

Because accessibility is not optional... it's the law.



# People are paying attention to AFN...

- Briefed National Governors Association's Homeland Security subcommittee regarding AFN considerations and activities in Virginia
- Briefed the FEMA Chief Administrator on AFN activities
- Briefed Governor's constituency outreach directors' group on AFN
- Received 2020 Governor's Honor Award for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion for work with the Health Equity Taskforce Leadership

HB 2085

State Coordinator of Emergency Management to establish an Emergency Management Equity Working Group to ensure that emergency management programs and plans provide support to at-risk individuals and populations disproportionately impacted by disasters.

and SB 1296

includes provisions in their emergency operations plans to ensure that such plans are applied equitably and that the needs of minority and vulnerable communities are met during emergencies.

Without accessibility, there can never truly be inclusion or equity.